



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

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Contact: Karen Dobson, Public Health Nurse Supervisor, 406-457-8945

Gayle Shirley, Communications Coordinator, 406-457-8908

Season's First Case of Influenza Is Confirmed in County

The season's first case of flu in Lewis and Clark County has been identified, the health department said Wednesday, bringing to 11 the number of confirmed cases statewide.

The local case of influenza A was diagnosed in a young child. The Montana Public Health Laboratory confirmed the diagnosis.

So far this season, flu activity in Montana is "sporadic," according to the state health department. In addition to the local case, 10 other cases of influenza A and B have been reported – in Custer, Flathead, Park, and Yellowstone counties. Influenza A and B are different types of flu virus; both cause seasonal epidemics of disease almost every winter in the United States.

About 5-20 percent of U.S. residents get the flu each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Flu season typically peaks in January or February.

During the 2011-2012 season, the first case of flu in the county was reported in January 2012. Statewide, there were a total of 98 cases, resulting in 10 hospitalizations and 3 deaths, the state health department reports.

Flu, or influenza, is highly contagious and can cause severe disease in high-risk populations like young children, the elderly, and people with chronic health conditions such as heart and lung disease and diabetes. Symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, headache, chills, and fatigue. Flu may also worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

People with flu can spread it to others up to three feet away. Most experts believe flu viruses are spread mainly by droplets expelled when people cough, sneeze, or talk. These droplets can contaminate surfaces and be spread by touching those surfaces or by directly inhaling the droplets.

"CDC recommends an annual flu vaccination for everyone 6 months and older to protect against the flu, but it takes two weeks for the vaccine to become effective," said Karen Dobson, public health nurse at the health department. "Now that we know there's flu in our community, we want to remind people of actions they can take along with getting vaccinated to reduce their chances of getting it."

These include:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water.

The mission of the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis and Clark County residents.

- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

If you do get sick, stay home and limit your contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others.

The health department offers flu shots and other immunizations on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 1930 Ninth Avenue. No appointment is needed.

For more information, call the health department's flu hotline at 457-8904 or visit www.lewisandclarkhealth.org.

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